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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4514
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

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STATE FOR EAP, PM, EAP/MTS, AND S/CT
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO AND J5
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER PREL EAID MOPS MARR RP

SUBJECT: ARROYO SHOWCASES US-PHILIPPINE PARTNERSHIP ON JOLO
AND DEFENDS VFA

¶1. (SBU) President Arroyo invited Charge Jones to accompany her on a January 8 trip to the southern island of Jolo, where the Philippine military, with the help of U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) and USAID, continues to battle terrorists of the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah. She highlighted for the Philippine public the benefits of what she called the US-Philippine "strategic alliance against terrorism and poverty."

¶2. (U) While on Jolo, President Arroyo and Charge inaugurated a \$1 million USAID-financed road in the former terrorist stronghold of Parang, which will reduce driving time to Jolo City from a day to just a half hour. Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Esperon, who later led a command briefing to the President, remarked to Charge that, as a young officer, it had taken him a week of hard fighting to reach the previously remote area. President Arroyo and Charge also inaugurated a refurbished military trauma center at Camp Bautista, which will be used to treat wounded soldiers. In her remarks to the soldiers and the press, President Arroyo especially applauded the Philippine military for its successful January 6 operation killing six significant terrorists (septel).

¶3. (SBU) Beginning on January 6 and 7, the government-owned television station aired a new documentary explaining the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the terms of the Smith custody transfer. The documentary highlighted the importance of the VFA and joint military exercises to the US-Philippine relationship. Malacanang has also commissioned US-based journalists to make a documentary on the US-Philippine joint activities on Jolo and the upcoming Balikatan exercises. Mission officers will provide all possible support for this endeavor. These public outreach efforts will complement the upcoming release of a Mission-produced documentary on the success of joint US-Philippine development and military operations on the former terrorist stronghold island of Basilan, as part of the Balikatan-02 military exercise.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Under President Arroyo's personal leadership, the Philippine government is now engaged in a more pro-active and sophisticated approach to explain publicly the value and importance of the Philippine partnership with the United States in the fight against terrorism and poverty, with a special emphasis on how the VFA makes such cooperation possible. We plan to reinforce this message in the coming weeks with the release of our Basilan documentary, the portcalls of the USS BLUE RIDGE, the

Balikatan-07 exercise, and the visit of Undersecretary Karen Hughes, among other ongoing activities.

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Jones